THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT

IN

ASHTABULA COUNTY, OHIO, 1834-1854

by

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CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF ANTI-SLAVERY AGITATION

The anti-slavery movement in the United States may be said to have gone through two stages. The first stage was the period of anti-slavery activities which were more or less nation-wide and which did not offend the slaveholders of the South; the second stage, which was entered about the year 1831, was a period in which the enemies of slavery fought it in so decisive a way that the slaveholders became greatly offended.[1]

During the first stage the majority of the people of the North were not much interested in the subject of slavery. It was a subject under consideration at the Constitutional Convention which met in Philadelphia in 1787. At this meeting Northern delegates wished to grant no representation in the Congress to be provided for based on the presence in states of negroes who were slaves. Southern delegates desired that full representation be given states holding slaves, counting each negro slave in the apportionment of Congressional representation. A compromise was reached by which five negro slaves were to be reckoned as equal to three white persons in this apportionment.

Another compromise arrived at by this convention reconciled the desire of Northern delegates and of believers in the necessity of creating a strong central government that the control of foreign commerce should be vested in this central government with a desire of Southern

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[1] John Spencer Bassett, A Short History of the United States, New York City (1929), 428.

delegates that the importation of African slaves into the nation be not stopped. This compromise provided that control of foreign commerce be given to the central government but a provision inserted in the Constitution forbidding the Congress from enacting legislation prohibiting the importation of African slaves before the year 1808.[2]

Probably slaveholders would have willingly considered plans leading to the eventual emancipation of slaves had not a cotton gin been invented by Eli Whitney which efficiently removed the seeds from the raw fibers. The cotton production of the South was negligible before this machine was invented in 1793. About this time a variety of cotton was found which could be successfully grown upon the uplands of the South. These two developments opened a great future for the South as a producer of raw cotton.[3]

This vista of great profits to be obtained from the production of cotton fiber on a large scale made the continuance of slavery seem very necessary to the slaveholders.[4] The inability of the slaveholders to place the human right of a negro to liberty over profits was indicated by the considerable popularity in the South of the plan of African colonization. Before 1795 slaveholders generally favored emancipation; between 1795 and 1830 this majority gradually came privately to oppose freeing the negro; by 1835 emancipation was definitely unacceptable to the South.

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[2] Bassett, Short History, 246-47.

[3] Albert Bushnell Hart, Slavery and Abolition, New York and London (1906), 172.

[4] Bassett, Short History, 345-46.

In 1816 the African Colonization Society was formed. Its purpose was in part to further emancipation by transporting freed negroes to Africa.[5] The region on the west coast of Africa called Liberia was to be settled and governed by these freedmen. This plan was calculated to please the people of the North by freeing negroes with the consent of their owners; it should please the freedmen by taking them back to the continent which was the natural home of their race; it was expected to be satisfactory to slaveholders because it would remove free negroes, who were considered undesirable in the South because they sometimes made the slaves restive in their bondage.[6]

Aside from the fact that the colonization idea was scarcely a real anti-slavery scheme it was not a success because very few negroes were set free through its existence[7] and it appeared that its greatest service lay in removing free negroes from the South and thus benefitting the institution of slavery. It failed, also, because free negroes preferred to remain in the United States and because a large number of those taken to Liberia died from diseases common in the unwholesome climate of that region.[8]

By 1830 most Northern critics of slavery were sure colonization was not practicable. It fostered rather than discouraged slavery

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[5] Bassett, Short History, 428.

[6] Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 237-38.

[7] For a discussion of the futility of the operations of the colonization society in Ohio consult Eugene H. Roseboom and Francis P. Weisenburger, A History of Ohio, New York (1934) 211-12.

[8] Bassett, Short History, 428, and Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 162-64, 238-40.

in the South. These Northern critics were becoming ready to attack slavery even to the point of giving offense to slaveholders. To avoid giving offense was to fail in trying to end slavery.

While the colonization idea waned forces had been at work several years which were to give Northern critics of slavery more emphatic means of expressing their opposition against the South's system of human bondage. Of these forces quite possibly the stronger was the Great Revival of religious enthusiasm begun in the central North about 1825 by Reverend Charles G. Finney. The other force was radical anti-slavery journalism, of which the outstanding example was later found in the labors of William Lloyd Garrison in publishing the Liberator.

When Finney, the Presbyterian revivalist commenced his tours through Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York he did not do so with the purpose of arousing anti-slavery sentiment. Finney's work was to stir the popular conscience to a degree where it might combat in a more decided manner such evils as alcoholic intemperance and failure to observe the Sabbath. Finney had a very magnetic personality and during his revival tours he interested many persons in various forms of uplift activities.

Among these admirers of Finney were Arthur and Lewis Tappan, wealthy importers in New York City, who had been engaged in philanthropy before they made Finney's acquaintance but whom the revivalist persuaded to make the furtherance of benevolent endeavors a chief pursuit instead of a mere hobby. Another important follower of Finney was Theodore Weld. Weld was a student in Hamilton College at Clinton, New York, when he was interested in revivalism by the Reverend Finney. He soon made a speaking tour to advance one of Finney's projects, the granting women the

rights of speaking and praying at revival meetings.[9]

Although Finney, Weld, and the Tappans were of chief importance in laying the foundations for the anti-slavery movement of the second stage considerable credit must be given to Garrison for his fearlessness in denouncing slavery. A study of his policies in publishing the Liberator reveals his character in both its strength and its weakness:

> I shall contend for the immediate enfranchisement of our slave population; I will be as harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice on this subject -- I do not wish to think, or speak, or write with moderation -- I am in earnest -- I will not equivocate -- I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard.[10]

It is difficult to decide whether his contention that slaves should be enfranchised at once, or his aversion to thinking, speaking, or writing with moderation, or his refusal to recede from any impracticable theory lessened most his usefulness in waging a campaign against slavery which might succeed only when the majority of citizens of the United States were convinced that it menaced the nation's political, social, and moral welfare. Inability to cooperate with others further reduced Garrison's services to the anti-slavery cause. His co-workers and disciples were minutely examined for flaws in doctrine and procedure and if found unsatisfactory they were promptly denounced.[11]

Although Garrison's significance in the anti-slavery movement

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[9] Gilbert H. Barnes, The Anti-Slavery Impulse, New York and London (1933), 7-22.

[10] Quotation from first editorial in Liberator, January 1, 1831, contained in John Jay Chapman, William Lloyd Garrison, Boston (1921).

[11] Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 197-98.

has been much exaggerated it is also possible to underrate him, for he did play an outstanding part in the formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The American Anti-Slavery Society was organized at Philadelphia in December, 1833. Many abolitionists in Philadelphia thought the time was not yet ripe for organizing the society but nevertheless it was done, largely because Garrison would not permit the matter to be postponed.[12]

Garrison furnished the impetus necessary for the formation of the society but the Tappans provided the money and credit. The Tappans favored "immediatism" in abolition. "Immediatism" meant freeing the slaves as soon as practicable but not necessarily immediately.[13] They realized that nearly three millions of negro slaves could not in practice be set free at once because society could not take them in at such short notice. Their illiteracy and the derangement to the industry and society of the South which would result precluded freeing them at once.

The organization of anti-slavery effort on state, county, and local bases required the services of a large number of workers several years. Before the society could become strong by virtue of public support throughout the North many obstacles had to be surmounted. It was necessary to convince those northerners holding moderate anti-slavery views that Garrison did not represent the principles and policies of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The belief was prevalent throughout the North that the society subscribed to the radical

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[12] Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 54-56, and Wendell Philips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison 1805-1879, I, London and New York (1885), 392-415.

[13] Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 48-50.

opinions of Garrison.

To popularize the society and to enlighten the public that "immediatism" did not purpose to free the slaves overnight Weld and other young men commenced speaking campaigns through the central North. Many of these speakers like Weld had left the conservative Lane Theological Seminary at Cincinnati in 1834 and had migrated to the new college at Oberlin, Ohio, because the Lane Seminary opposed their efforts to teach negroes in Cincinnati.[14] Weld was frequently abused when he started to address a meeting but his persistence, speaking ability, and complete conviction that slavery was a crime which it was righteous to combat almost always convinced his audience and caused them to organize a local anti-slavery society at the close of his lectures.[15] Many Northern congressmen, such as Joshua Reed Giddings, who denounced slavery from the floor of Congress during the 1840's and 1850's were first interested in the anti-slavery movement by Weld.

The Tappans and Weld were the nucleus of a group of abolitionists who made New York City their headquarters and who are often called the New York Committee. The committee wrote and caused to be written tracts attacking slavery and explaining its enormities. These tracts were sent out in large quantities.[16]

Anti-slavery sentiment in Ohio followed both schools of abolitionist thought. Some localities and organizations believed with Garrison that there should be no union with slaveholders although the

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[14] Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 74-78, and Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 190-93.

[15] Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 79-88.

[16] Ibid., 58-64.

United States Constitution did establish such a union; in other districts the friends of the slaves were unimpressed by Garrison and inclined toward "immediatism." The Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, organized about 1835, was influenced by such disunion abolitionists as Abby Kelley to fall in line behind Garrison.[17] In the Western Reserve Garrisonian speakers received respectful attention but the members of their audiences continued to vote and thus lend countenance to the Constitution. In the 1840's Garrison and the negro speaker, Frederick Douglas, visited Oberlin to inveigh against the Constitution. They were opposed in public debate by President Mahan of Oberlin College and by Professor Hudson of the faculty of that institution so effectively that they accomplished nothing and the people of Oberlin continued to attend the polls.[18]

By 1840 the anti-slavery movement had entered its political phase and its center was fast shifting to Washington. This was largely a result of the struggle of a few congressmen from the North to maintain the right of petition. Petitions on the subject of slavery were very distasteful to Southern members. In 1836 the House of Representatives passed a "gag rule" that in the future petitions aimed against slavery should not be considered by the House in any way.[19] The representatives from the slaveholding states then appeared to be in the wrong by seeming to wish to destroy an important right of the freemen of the North as

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[17] C. B. Galbreath, Biographical Notes at end of "The Anti-Slavery Movement in Columbiana County," Ohio Arch. and Hist. Pub., XXX (1921), 391.

[18] Wilbur Greeley Burroughs, "Oberlin's Part in the Slavery Conflict," Ohio Arch. and Hist. Pub., XX (1911), 279-80, and Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 194.

[19] Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 259-60.

they had long before succeeded in removing all rights from the slaves. Many anti-slavery men of the North now began to fight slavery through sponsorship of anti-slavery petitions who had refused to subscribe to the doctrines of Garrison or of the New York Committee. The anti-slavery societies now commenced to pour a torrent of petitions of all sorts upon Washington -- that the slave trade be abolished in the District of Columbia, that slavery be abolished in that district, that the coastal slave trade be prohibited, and that the slave trade between states be stopped. John Quincy Adams took the lead in presenting such petitions to the House of Representatives.[20] He was usually not permitted to get any farther in presenting an anti-slavery petition than to mention the subject upon which it treated when he would be declared out of order and would be compelled to pass on to the next petition which would almost always be another anti-slavery petition. Congressman Giddings proved an able second to Adams in this petition strategy.[21] Before the passage of the first "gag rule" the abolitionists were considered enemies of the public peace; after the passage of the "gag rule" abolitionists became righteous defenders of Northern consitutional rights and the unenviable position formerly held by them was occupied by the slave power.[22] By 1844 the Southern members saw that the petition flood could not be stopped and the "gag rule" was rescinded.[23]

Ashtabula County was settled with citizens who were keenly

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[20] Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 263-64.

[21] Ibid., 264.

[22] James Truslow Adams, The Adams Family, New-York (1930), 215-24.

[23] House Journal, 28 Cong., 2 Sess., 10-12.

interested in these developments in the anti-slavery movement. The county was of importance because it shared in these events. At all times from 1832 until 1854 a plurality of its voters were to prove willing to leave one party for another and to desert one political idol for the standard of another if necessary to be constant in their opposition to slavery and its extension into the national territories. From 1838 until 1859 Joshua R. Giddings, an unusually determined defender of all human rights, represented in Congress the district of which Ashtabula County was a part. The fluctuations of political party and popular sentiment in that county are a representative cross-section taken from the anti-slavery movement of the free states south of the Great Lakes.

CHAPTER II

ASHTABULA COUNTY ORGANIZES TO COMBAT SLAVERY

The Ashtabula County Anti-Slavery Society was organized at a meeting held in Ashtabula, May 27, 1834. Its pronouncement in favor of the doctrine of immediatism in emancipation was one to which the New York Committee could not easily have taken exception:

> To prevent misapprehension we avow distinctly and plainly, that by 'immediate emancipation' we do not mean that the slaves shall be turned loose upon the nation to roam as vagabonds and aliens; nor that they shall be instantly invested with all political rights and privileges; nor that they shall be expelled from their native land to a foreign clime, as the price and condition of their freedom.[1]

In its constitution the society declared it would do none of the following things:

1) incite the slaves to rebellion,

2) urge foreign nations or the free states to interfere in behalf of the slaves, or

3) request Congress to intrude on the rights of Southern states.

Several of the officers which the society selected at this meeting were men who were to fight slavery consistently throughout this period. O. W. St. John of Morgan, one of the managers of the society, was long to be active in the leadership of the Liberty and Free Soil Parties, which were to engross so much attention from the citizenry of the county during the 1840's and early 1850's. St. John's father-in-law,

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[1] Ashtabula Sentinel, June 21, 1834 (at the Ashtabula Public Library, Ashtabula, Ohio).

Dr. O. K. Hawley of Austinburg, was elected vice-president of the society. Another manager of the society was Dr. Elijah Coleman of Jefferson, one of the county's first physicians and an immigrant into Ashtabula County from New England.[2] A large proportion of the leaders of the anti-slavery sentiment of the county were from Massachusetts and Connecticut.

The society's first annual meeting was held at Austinburg the following July 4. This meeting resolved to

1) contribute $100 toward the support of an agent to be sent to the South by the American or the Western Reserve Anti-Slavery Society to persuade the free people of the South to take steps to end slavery,

2) petition Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and in the national territories,

3) petition the Ohio Legislature to grant citizenship to the negroes of Ohio "according to moral worth,"

4) consider no scheme of emancipation which would involve disunion, and

5) congratulate the Colonisation Society on its success but continue to believe that colonization would only partly solve the slavery problem

6) consider the colonizationists unjustified in censuring all other plans for ending slavery than their own.[3]

In 1835 and 1836 the society held no meetings. In 1837 the county society became an auxiliary of the Ohio State Anti-Slavery Society.[4] In June and July further proof was furnished that many citizens in the county were keenly interested in the institution of slavery. During these two months an animated exchange of views concerning slavery occurred in

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[2] W. W. Williams, History of Ashtabula County, Philadelphia (1878), 119-20.

[3] Sentinel, July 19, 1834.

[4] Ibid., February 11, 1837.

the forum of the Ashtabula Sentinel. The controversy commenced in the issue of June 9 with a communication from "H" in which he voiced a hope that Arthur Tappan's failure in business would sharply curtail his abolitionist activities.[5] The issue of June 16 contained another letter from "H" asserting that negroes were not denied religious rights. He wished to prove this assertion by the fact that the Methodist Episcopal Church had 82,296 colored members of whom 73,181 lived in slave states and most of whom were probably slaves.[6]

On June 23 the Sentinel contained a long letter from "CC" of Jefferson in which a statement made by "H" that abolitionists were fanatics was denied.[7] On June 28 "H" replied that many abolitionists were sufficiently fanatical to be willing to destroy the Union in order to eradicate slavery.[8]

The issue of June 28 also contained a letter from "S" of Ashtabula who considered the statements of "CC" far too sweeping, particularly the statement that all who condemned abolitionism were upholders of slavery. "S" admitted that Congress possessed power to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia but he thought persons outside the District were overly concerned about a condition which was of great interest only to persons residing there.[9] On July 5 "CC" declared that slavery was indeed of great concern to Northerners because in the event of an extensive slave insurrection Northern assistance would be required by the slaveholders.[10]

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[5] Sentinel, June 9, 1837.

[6] Ibid., June 16, 1837.

[7] Ibid., June 23, 1837.

[8] Ibid., June 28, 1837.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., July 5, 1837.

"Y" of Unionville came to the defense of slavery on July 19 by reporting that he had travelled much through the South and had never seen slaves who were not well-fed and well-clothed. He mentioned the case of one negro who had earned $350 per year and whose master had permitted him to keep $50 annually.[11] On July 26 "L" entered the controversy by announcing his opinion that this particular negro would have been still better treated if he had been allowed to keep the entire $350. He also stated that southerners were becoming aware that the North was increasing in population, wealth, culture, and industrial power faster than the South.[12] This last observation of "L" was proved by the marked preference of European immigrants in this nation for the North as a new home and the large sums of European capital which were being invested in Northern business enterprises.

This exchange of sentiments, which ranged from abolitionist to almost pro-slavery points of view, was terminated by another letter in the columns of the Sentinel which warned the editor and also the debaters that a large number of subscribers to the Sentinel thought the space in the paper could be put to a better and more interesting use. It stated that if the paper continued to publish these controversial communications it might expect to lose many subscribers.

During 1838 and 1839 the county anti-slavery society exhibited its consciousness of events occurring on the national plane of anti-slavery endeavor. A meeting of the county society held at Morgan, January 16, 1838, resolved that it deeply regretted the killing of Elijah

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[11] Sentinel, July 19, 1837.

[12] Ibid., July 26, 1837.

P. Lovejoy at Alton, Illinois by a pro-slavery mob. That Lovejoy, editor of a newspaper critical of slavery, should be killed for his courage seemed not only lamentable but also unbelievable to the citizens of a county whose leading newspaper, the Ashtabula Sentinel, was outspoken in its censure of slavery. This same meeting expressed its animosity towards the "gag rule" then in effect in the United States House of Representatives by petitioning the Ohio Legislature to pass a resolution condemning the "gag rule" and also to request Ohio's senators and representatives to attempt to rescind the notorious "gag".[13] As late as April 30, 1841, in a meeting at Ashtabula, the county society showed its good standing with the state and national societies by appointing three delegates to attend the meeting to be held at Mount Pleasant, Ohio, June 2 on the anniversary of the state society and by authorizing the executive committee to choose a delegation to attend the national convention to be held at New York May 18.[14]

Meantime an Ashtabula County Female Anti-Slavery Society was also at work. It received relatively little publicity as compared to the men's society although it possessed some strength of numbers, one meeting being attended by 224 members.[15] The last meeting of the ladies' county society recorded by the Sentinel was held at Jefferson, December 9, 1845. Little was done beyond reaffirming its belief in the propriety of women engaging in anti-slavery agitation.[16] The last men-

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[13] Sentinel, January 27, 1838.

[14] Ibid., May 8, 1841.

[15] Ibid., January 16, 1836.

[16] Ibid., December 30, 1845.

tion of the ladies' society to be found in the Sentinel was a notice for a meeting to be held at Lenox, May 2, 1848. This notice was written by Miss Betsey M. Cowles of Austinburg, secretary of the ladies' anti-slavery organization in the county.[17] Miss Cowles, a teacher who organized normal schools throughout the north central states and who for three years was superintendent of schools at Painesville, Ohio, was well known through the county as a Garrisonian abolitionist. She was instrumental in getting Abby Kelley to speak in Ashtabula County.[18]

While the Ashtabula County Anti-Slavery Society flourished, a rival organization, the Ashtabula County Colonization Society, was waning. The county colonization society appeared to have been well organized before the anti-slavery society of the county was organized in 1834.[19] Records do not reveal the date of its organization. It was an auxiliary of the American Colonization Society and conformed to the principles of the great body of colonizationists. The county society sought money to further the plans of the national society by collections taken in churches[20] and by trying to get Congress to appropriate land to be sold by the society. A notice appeared in the Sentinel, December 22, 1838, from Seth Young, secretary of the Windsor Colonization Society, that a local meeting be held to choose delegates to attend a county convention at Jefferson, January 3, 1839, to petition Congress to appropriate 50,000,000 or more acres of land for the American Colonization

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[17] Sentinel, April 29, 1848.

[18] Williams, History of Ashtabula County, 100-101.

[19] Sentinel, July 12, 1834.

[20] Ibid., December 22, 1838.

Society.[21] When this county convention met, somewhat later than had been planned, on January 24, 1839, it requested the senators and representatives of Ohio in Congress to influence that body to appropriate 100,000 acres of land for the national society.

This same meeting of the county colonizationists approved the following resolution which indicates the moderation with which the colonizationists participated in the anti-slavery movement:

> Resolved that we cannot but deprecate all political action calculated to array one portion of the Union against another or to cripple the energies of any benevolent society now in existence.[22]

A colonization meeting at Jefferson received a letter from Elisha Whittlesey of Canfield, Trumbull County, Giddings' predecessor in Congress, which sought to exalt the methods of the colonizationists above those of the more radical opponents of slavery. Whittlesey had been invited to address this meeting but was unable to attend. One paragraph from his letter read:

> How much more satisfactory must it be to the patriot; to the friend of the slave; to the Christian; and to the moralist; to be the means of restoring a slave to freedom by his own, and by the voluntary consent of his master; with the knowledge that he is to be transported to the land of his fathers, of his kindred, and of his blood, there to be placed on a footing of perfect equality, in a republic formed by his own race, than can be derived from discharging the office of a secret emissary; prowling among the negro huts, under the cover of darkness -- seeking for objects to make discontented -- violating one of the domestic relations -- laying and prosecuting plans for secret escapes -- conducting poor, deluded human beings through the country,

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[21] Sentinel, December 22, 1838.

[22] Ibid., February 9, 1839.

> at that time devoted by man-stealers and horse-thieves to the prosecution of works that shun the light, and eventually landing them on the cold and inhospitable shore of Canada, without a house to shelter them or food to sustain them. If report be true, there are those who are engaged in conducting negroes, secretly and covertly, through this part of the state, from the Ohio River to the Lakes, to be transported to Canada. In the day-time they are shut up in cellars or in barns, and in the night they are crammed into wagons, with as little space as is allowed by slaves engaged in Foreign man-stealing.[23]

The last meeting of the Ashtabula County Colonization Society recorded in the Sentinel was held at Jefferson, July 5, 1841.[24] Its passing could not possibly have aroused much regret in the county for the utmost a member could do in practice to end slavery was to contribute money and membership must have seemed futile to any sincere opponent of the South's system of human bondage. Slight reason can be found for the existence of a colonization society in Ashtabula County and it is strange that it maintained its organization there as long as it did.

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[23] Sentinel, July 20, 1839.

[24] Ibid., July 17, 1841.

CHAPTER III

THE ANTI-SLAVERY FORCES ENTER POLITICS IN EARNEST

A study of the anti-slavery movement in Ashtabula County would be incomplete if it did not give considerable attention to the conspicuous part played by Joshua R. Giddings. Accustomed to hard work clearing timber from land to be farmed and laboring hard to acquire some education he had reason to consider himself of the people as well as for them. After acquiring a lawyer's training in the office of Elisha Whittlesey at Canfield in Trumbull County, he commenced a practice at Jefferson, the county seat of Ashtabula County. There he took an active interest in many forms of philanthropic endeavor. He was converted to the doctrines of Theodore Weld in the earlier 1830's when the latter spoke in Jefferson. He played an important part in organizing the county anti-slavery society and with his law partner, B. F. Wade, he helped extend it throughout the county.[1] In 1839 he was chosen president of the Ashtabula County Bible Society at its organization meeting. The purpose of this society was to purchase Bibles for poor families and poor children;[2] as late as 1843 he served on its executive committee.[3] He helped organize the temperance movement of the county and at one meeting offered a resolution that the Ohio Legislature be petitioned to follow the examples of Massachusetts, Maine, and Tennessee and prohibit the

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[1] Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 82.

[2] Sentinel, September 14, 1839.

[3] Ibid., June 17, 1843.

sale of liquor in the state.[4] He assisted in getting speakers from the Baltimore Delegation of Reformed Drunkards to speak in the county.[5] In 1838 he served on a committee which drafted a constitution for the Ashtabula County Historical and Philosophical Society.[6]

Giddings became active in the leadership of the dominant political group of the county, the Whig party. In 1834 he presided over the Whig county convention.[7] A reading of the letter which Congressman Whittlesey, United States Representative from the 16th Ohio District, wrote Giddings January 29, 1837 arouses a suspicion that Giddings wished an office in the national government. Part of Whittlesey's letter follows:

> .....If I rightly comprehend you, you entertain the impression, that I have assailed you, and endeavored to lessen you in the esteem of the electors, or a portion of them, of the 16th Ohio District. I am sure your feelings cannot be any more severely tried than mine are. If I am not mistaken in the inference I draw from your inquiries I beg of you not to do me the injustice to suppose for a moment, that I have directly or indirectly, by act, word, or deed attempted to effect either the one or the other. If my declarations are not to be taken in evidence, I appeal to my most intimate friends, from whom I have not disguised my feelings, whether I have not on all occasions expressed for you the warmest friendship and the strongest attachment.
>
> You ask me whether I said to Mr. Bloss that it would have been impossible for you to have been elected if I had declined being a candidate, or that you could not have carried the Whig strength in Trumbull County if you had been a candidate, and you ask me further whether I substantially made the same represen-

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[4] Sentinel, June 9, 1838.

[5] Ibid., September 25, 1841.

[6] Ibid., July 21, 1838.

[7] Ibid., August 30, 1834.

> tations to Mr. Griswold. I cannot recollect the exact language used in conversation with either of the gentlemen mentioned but I will give you the substance and state the occasion. After I saw you at Chardon, and found you did not approve of my being a candidate, I felt greatly distressed. This arose from your disappointment and a belief you did not appreciate my motives. I wrote my declination several weeks before and sent it to Mr. Fitch, and on my return from the west I was disappointed it had not been published. On my way to Chardon I was told at Warren that unless I was a candidate our friends apprehended so serious a discussion as to endanger not only the Congressional but also the state election in the county of Trumbull. Mr. Parsons said he had been informed when on the Lake Shore that the people in the county of Geauga were determined in the event I was not a candidate to set up one in that county, and that in Ashtabula, yourself and Mr. Wilder were spoken of.
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> I stated to you freely, how averse I was to be a candidate and that I had only consented on the contingency that our friends could not agree on any other person. In my conversations with you, the impressions were left on my mind, that you gave me no credit for sincerity when I assured you, I did not want to be a candidate. I told you I would not have been but from a conviction the state and district election would have been put at hazard.[8]

Added evidence that Giddings was ambitious politically to the extent that he wished to succeed Congressman Whittlesey at as early a date as possible is furnished by another letter which Whittlesey wrote Giddings May 27, 1837. In this letter Whittlesey stated that he did not consider it advisable to resign his seat in Congress at that time because a special session was to be held, commencing the first Monday in September, and thus without him the district would be unrepresented or a special election would be necessary.[9]

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[8] Elisha Whittlesey to J. R. Giddings, Washington, D.C., January 29, 1837, Elisha Whittlesey Correspondence. (This correspondence is at Western Reserve Historical Library, Cleveland, Ohio.)

[9] Whittlesey to J. R. Giddings, Canfield, Ohio, May 27, 1837, Ibid.

The Ashtabula Sentinel, always well disposed toward Giddings and located in a part of the 16th Ohio District quite distant from Canfield, Whittlesey's home, at no time advocated Whittlesey's withdrawal from Congress. Although Ashtabula County Whigs did not approve of the various "gags" in force in the House of Representatives from 1836 until 1844 it is not known that they thought Whittlesey wrong in his attitude toward the disposition accorded anti-slavery petitions in the House. His stand on the matter is revealed in a letter in which he criticized the petition policy of John Quincy Adams. Part of the letter read:

> .... I presume I have told a hundred people during the summer, that I thought Mr. Adams was inconsistent. He was a stickler for the right of petition: but he would only receive abolition petitions, read them, order them to be printed, and then lay them on the table, and let them remain as buried in the tomb of the Capulets, that I thought he was promoting an excitement without securing any important principle: that I did not see how the right of petition was secured, when it was determined, not to act on the petition, that I was against exciting one section of the country against another section, that I would not only receive the petition but I would refer it to a committee for a statesmanlike report, that Mr. Adams said he would not vote to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia; whereas I would if the same could be done without endangering the peace and quiet of the other states.[10]

Whittlesey resigned his seat in Congress in the summer of 1838 and the Whig Congressional District Convention meeting at Bloomfield in Trumbull County in September nominated Giddings for both the unexpired term and the following full term.[11] Ashtabula County Whigs accepted the result of the deliberations of the convention at Bloomfield as a mere act of justice to their county for several of the elections during

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[10] Whittlesey to J. W. Edwards, Canfield, Ohio, September 14, 1837, ibid.

[11] Sentinel, September 8, 1838.

Whittlesey's fifteen years in Congress had been victories for him only because Ashtabula County never failed strongly to support him at the polls.[12] Giddings was easily elected for both terms in the election on October 9, 1838. Of the approximate 2600 ballots cast for the office in his home county Giddings received nearly three out of each four votes.[13]

Within less than one year after Giddings entered Congress abolitionism intruded into the councils of the Whigs of Ashtabula County and produced a confusion there which caused a Whig defeat in the county elections of 1839. Ordinarily the Whigs were easily victorious in county elections but in October 1839 they lost to the Democrats all the county offices to be filled by the election except one commissionership.[14]

In studying the causes of the defeat of the Whigs it is apparent at once that it was caused by a schism in the party's ranks in which one group was abolitionist and the other was non-abolitionist. To decide which group was abolitionist is difficult because each claimed the other to be under that odium and thus responsible for the split which allowed the Democrats to win the election. A citizen styling himself an "Ashtabula County Whig" wrote the Columbus Buckeye Whig that the abolitionists of the county Whig Party had got control of the party machinery and had held the county convention so soon before the election that the non-abolitionist Whigs were left no time to set up an independent ticket. Therefore they saw no choice other than to support the Democrats.[15]

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[12] Sentinel, August 18, 1838.

[13] Ibid., October 20, 1838.

[14] Ibid., October 12, 1839.

[15] Sentinel, November 23, 1839 contained copy of this letter first printed in Columbus Buckeye Whig.

This explanation would seem correct at least as concerning the shortness of the period between the Whigs' county convention and the election for the convention was held September 23 and the election October 8. When it is learned that the Whig Convention had nominated to the lower house of the state legislature C. W. St. John and Abner Kellogg, two men then and afterwards prominent in the anti-slavery movement in the county it is possible to believe that the "Ashtabula County Whig" had reason to claim that the abolitionists had controlled the convention.

Soon three members of the Whig Central Committee, Samuel Hendry, Benjamin B. Gaylord, and Ebenezer Wood, sent a joint letter to the Buckeye Whig in which they declared that the Whigs who had voted with the Democrats were the abolitionist element.[16] The matter rested with the Whig seceders rejoining the party ranks in the next campaign. This split did not appear to weaken permanently the Whig strength at the time but it was not an auspicious precedent to establish for use in future dissensions within that party.

By 1839 the Whigs of Ashtabula County were not all active anti-slavery men -- quite possibly only a minority of them were so classified, but it is certain that most anti-slavery men were Whigs. Not only is a study of the personnel of the two organizations a ground for this conclusion but it is strengthened by the fact that during the late 1830's and the early 1840's Congressman Giddings was nominated by Whig conventions and his anti-slavery efforts in Washington were approved by anti-slavery meetings. Although in September, 1841, the county

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[16] Sentinel, November 23, 1839. Copy of a letter to the Columbus Buckeye Whig.

anti-slavery society nominated a county ticket to no electoral success[17] it never attempted to defeat Giddings during the years it bore the designation of an anti-slavery society. In May, 1841, a meeting of the Ashtabula County Anti-Slavery Society at Austinburg warmly commended Giddings for having showed that Southern congressmen had caused the prosecution of the Seminole War in Florida during the presidencies of Jackson and Van Buren and had appropriated $100,000 to remove the Seminoles to west of the Mississippi River chiefly to recapture fugitive negro slaves sheltered by these Florida Indians.[18]

The history of this Seminole War lends weight to Giddings' contention that it was a slaveholders' conspiracy. In 1833 the United States Government made a treaty with the Seminole Indians whereby they were to be removed to west of the Mississippi River. Fugitive negro slaves who had settled among the Seminoles and had intermarried with them believed that they would be seized at the time of the removal and would be returned into slavery. These fugitives combined with the more untamable among the Seminoles to resist the removal. They were led by Osceola, a chief whose wife was half negro. In 1835 fighting commenced and continued until 1837 when a large number of Seminoles and negroes went to Tampa where they were to embark for New Orleans. At Tampa they found white men prepared to reclaim the fugitive negroes. The war recommenced and although Osceola was soon captured the war was not ended until 1842 when the Seminoles surrendered and the majority of them were removed. Giddings' opinion that the fighting against the Seminoles was

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[17] Sentinel, September 25, 1841.

[18] Ibid., May 29, 1841.

chiefly a slaveholders' war was shared by the anti-slavery men of the North with whom it was very unpopular.[19]

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[19] Bassett, Short History, 467-68.

CHAPTER IV

THE WHIG VERSUS THE LIBERTY PARTY IN ASHTABULA COUNTY

When the American Anti-Slavery Society was organized in 1833 its organizers intended to use it as a non-political weapon with which to combat slavery. Garrison, indeed, not only wished the society to accomplish its purpose by non-political means but he also declared that citizens should avoid politics even so far as to refrain from voting. It is improbable that many citizens remained away from the polls as a result of his counsel but before the anti-slavery petitions sent to Congress provoked the House of Representatives to pass its successive "gag" rules commencing in 1836 the anti-slavery societies had little political connection. The petition flood shifted the center of anti-slavery activity to Washington. At this same time leadership of the anti-slavery movement came to be vested largely in the members of Congress who possessed the courage to dispute the constitutionality of the "gags" by persisting in the presentation of the petitions.

The leader of the small group of congressmen who presented the anti-slavery petitions was a Whig, John Quincy Adams. His most prominent ally in this work was also a Whig, Joshua R. Giddings. Despite the labors of these two statesmen the great majority of Whigs in Congress would not fight slavery in any effective way nor could the Whig Party be considered an anti-slavery organization. Because the Democratic Party was, in effect, pro-slavery and the Whig Party was not anti-slavery ardent haters of the South's system of human bondage organ-

ized the Liberty Party.

The Liberty Party was formed in 1840.[1] In that year its presidential candidate, James G. Birney, a southerner converted to abolitionism by Theodore Weld, received 7100 votes.[2]

In Ashtabula County the anti-slavery society shaded almost imperceptibly into the Liberty Party. The annual meeting of the county anti-slavery society was held at Andover, August 10, 1842. It was at the same time the first convention of the Liberty Party of the county. The resolutions committee of this party convention consisting of L. Bissell, C. Loomis, B. Atkins, A. Coleman, and O. K. Hawley reported the following resolution:

> Resolved, that with the experience we now have, it is in vain to look to either of the two great political parties as such, which divide the county for any efficient action against slavery; and that all attempts to carry out the principles of the Liberty Party in connection with either of them, will be futile.[3]

Another resolution stated that every elector should vote for Leicester King, the Liberty candidate for the governorship of Ohio.

In September, 1842, the Liberty Party nominated its first county ticket[4] but it did not attract many votes. Most interest centered on the vote in the county for governor in which the Liberty Party displayed considerable strength for a county organization then but two months old, the vote for King being 453. In an older organization this

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[1] Theodore Clarke Smith, The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest, New York, London, and Bombay (1897), 53-4.

[2] Bassett, Short History, 443.

[3] Sentinel, August 20, 1842.

[4] Ibid., September 24, 1842.

county vote would have seemed very insignificant for the Democratic candidate, Wilson Shannon, received 976 votes while the vote for the Whig candidate, Thomas Corwin, was 2517.[5]

The Liberty men as seceders from the county Whig organization were of the opinion that Giddings should at once also desert the Whig Party and come under the Liberty standard. Because Giddings had failed to pursue such a course a county convention of the Liberty Party meeting at Lenox February 22, 1844, resolved:

> We regard Joshua R. Giddings as a man sincerely desirous of doing good, of promoting the happiness of his fellowbeings, and we honor and respect him for his public and private virtues, and for his efforts in the cause of human rights; at the same time we cannot but feel that his sphere of usefulness is very much circumscribed by his continued adherrence to the Whig Party, and that much of his political influence is thus thrown in favor of slavery, and so long as he remains in his present position we must be permitted to withhold from him our political support.[6]

Series of resolutions adopted by the Liberty men of the county set forth in some detail their beliefs and aims in the anti-slavery movement. The meeting held at Lenox on Washington's birthday in 1844 which had censured Giddings for not leaving the Whigs resolved that

1) the theory recently advanced by southerners that neither state nor federal governments could abolish slavery because such action would conflict with the right of private property was unsound,

2) slavery should be abolished in the District of Columbia, and

3) the Ohio Legislature should be petitioned to

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[5] Sentinel, October 15, 1842.

[6] Ibid., March 2, 1844.

> legislate that no Ohioan might assist in the recapture of a slave nor that jails or other public property be used to facilitate the return of fugitives to bondage.[7]

In June, 1844, a meeting at Williamsfield adopted resolutions which declared that it was the duty of the nation to abolish slavery by executive action and the duty of the people to elect officers who would act constitutionally to abolish slavery.[8]

The efforts of the Liberty men in Ashtabula County to make themselves felt as an important political force reached their climax in the presidential campaign of 1844. In addition to defining their political principles at Lenox and Williamsfield they took steps to enlarge their numbers and to organize themselves more perfectly. Provision was made early in the year for the holding of monthly Liberty county conventions until the election was held.[9] In March, B. B. Hunter sent a letter to the Sentinel from Austinburg in which he urged that the Liberty Party be organized on a township as well as a county basis. He admitted that Liberty men would not be better qualified to administer township affairs than Whigs, Democrats, or even slaveholders but he thought such a minute organization would furnish a solid base upon which county, state, and national Liberty organizations might achieve success.[10] Evidence is lacking to prove that Hunter's advice was followed and apparently the Liberty Party remained organized only on the basis of the county.

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[7] Sentinel, March 2, 1844.

[8] Ibid., June 29, 1844.

[9] Ibid., March 2, 1844.

[10] Ibid., March 9, 1844.

During this presidential campaign the Liberty men considered that their belief that the Whig Party did not sincerely oppose slavery was justified by the nomination of Henry Clay as the Whigs' candidate for the presidency. Regarding Clay's candidacy a Liberty meeting at New Lyme in July resolved:

> We heartily respond to the sentiment said to have recently been put forth by Dr. Beecher 'that things had indeed come to a strange pass in this professedly moral and religious community when an open slave-holder and duellist was sought to be placed in the Presidential chair.'[11]

To make their position definite and to burn all bridges of retreat to their former Whig allegiance a Liberty county convention at Jefferson, August 28, resolved:

> Whereas, we hear that sundry evil-minded persons have industriously reported that the Liberty men of Ashtabula County have been induced to abandon their opposition to Henry Clay, and that they are going to cast their votes for the slaveholder of Ashland [Clay]. Now, therefore, be it known to the Liberty men of the whole county that the efforts to seduce us from our allegiance to freedom, although many and strenuous, have utterly failed. We shall at the next election give a largely increased Liberty vote, the efforts of J. R. Giddings and Co. notwithstanding.[12]

The Liberty men did not support Giddings in 1844 for reelection to the House of Representatives but nominated Edward Wade of Cuyahoga County, a brother of B. F. Wade of Jefferson, to be their candidate for Congress.[13] In the 1840's Ashtabula County was placed in a congressional district with Cuyahoga, Lake, and Geauga Counties. Giddings was elected

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[11] Sentinel, July 27, 1844.

[12] Ibid., September 7, 1844.

[13] Ibid., September 14, 1844.

for a fourth full term.

The Liberty Party of the county declined after 1844. During the remaining three years of the existence of the organization it was engaged chiefly in defending itself from the reproaches of the Whigs who charged that the activities of the Liberty Party in 1844 had injured more than they had advanced the fortunes of the anti-slavery movement.[14] The Whigs undoubtedly possessed grounds for this charge. The Democrats captured the large electoral vote of New York by a narrow margin because the small vote for the Liberty candidate, Birney, reduced Clay's vote in that state. New York's electoral support gave the election to Polk. Had New York voted for Clay the latter would have been elected.[15] There was no doubt that the election of Polk was a victory for slavery for he was committed to the annexation of Texas,[16] which was an event the anti-slavery forces greatly desired to prevent. Clay might have been considered a more satisfactory candidate for the support of the anti-slavery vote than Polk because during the earlier part of his campaign he had expressed an opinion that Texas should not be annexed in the face of strong northern opposition. Later, it is true, he qualified this stand and by so doing lost many votes in the North.[17] The election of Polk could be assumed to make certain annexation while Clay's election would make that outcome much less probable. In a resolution adopted at

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[14] Sentinel, May 29, 1845.

[15] George Pierce Garrison, Westward Extension, New York and London (1906), 137, and Bassett, Short History, 443.

[16] Bassett, Short History, 443.

[17] Garrison, Westward Extension, 135.

Jefferson in May, 1845, the Liberty men refused to admit they had erred the previous autumn in withholding their support from Clay. This resolution read:

> Resolved, that though we have been so often and so indignantly censured and reproached for maintaining our position and integrity at the last fall election as Liberty men and Liberty voters, and although calumniously reported as giving our support to a slaveholder and one that would do all in his power to enlarge the area of slavery [Polk], we yet feel strong and unwavering in our idealism; believing firmly that it is the only one upon which can be based any system that shall pacifically abolish slavery in these United States; and a conscious happiness in knowing not only that we did not either directly or indirectly give our influence or our vote to one that would do all in his power to enlarge the area of slavery, or even to one that would be glad to see it under any circumstances.[18]

Throughout the years of bitter feeling during the middle 1840's the Ashtabula Sentinel upheld the Whig cause against the Liberty men. Its editor, Samuel Hendry, pointed out to his readers that although the Whig Party contained many slaveholders it was, nevertheless, the party which had elected and repeatedly reelected John Quincy Adams and J. R. Giddings to Congress.[19] He considered it the most effective force opposing slavery. Quite possibly the Liberty Party would have taken much firmer root in the county had it been assisted in its campaign by as popular a newspaper as the Sentinel.

After again unsuccessfully supporting Edward Wade for the office of United States Representative in 1846[20] the Liberty Party of

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[18] Sentinel, May 15, 1845.

[19] Ibid., May 29, 1845.

[20] Ibid., September 7, 1846.

Ashtabula County entered upon 1847, which was to prove to be the last complete calendar year of its existence. The last Liberty convention recorded by the Sentinel was held at Jefferson on June 23, 1847. The tenor of the resolutions adopted did not indicate any lack of optimism as to the party's prospects. The resolutions committee, consisting of B. B. Hunter, Q. F. Atkins, A. Bagley, and Dr. J. J. Elwell, resolved that the Liberty men should continue their refusal to vote for any slaveholder for any office. Another resolution reaffirmed their belief that the Whig and Democratic Parties did not sincerely oppose slavery. A third resolution adopted proved to be the last shot fired at the still dominant Whig organization. This resolution read:

> Resolved, that as we were able in 1844 (according to Whig testimony) and did succeed in defeating the strongest man in the Whig Party, and also annexed Texas, we will take courage, believing the Liberty Party will succeed eventually in effecting the overthrow of slavery.[21]

The Liberty Party came to an end in the county after less than a half dozen years existence because the great majority of the people of the county were not yet willing to consider the abolition of slavery the paramount objective of political activity. In 1847 the majority of northerners as well as the majority of citizens in Ashtabula County were not disposed to do more than demand that the spread of slavery be halted.

While the Liberty Party was engaged in its unsuccessful effort to wrest political supremacy from the Whigs the people of the county were opposing the moves of Democratic administrations at Washington to add Texas to the United States. The first recorded meeting in the county to state its disapproval of plans to annex Texas was a meeting

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[21] Sentinel, July 12, 1847.

of the Jefferson Township Anti-Slavery Society on July 4, 1837 over which Giddings presided.[22] At that date there was slight danger that Texas might be annexed and the institution of slavery thus given more land upon which to graft itself because President Van Buren, a northerner, was not in favor of annexation. President Jackson had favored yielding to the demands of the slaveholders and of the Texans, recently freed from Mexican rule, that they be joined to the United States. As this issue arose in 1836, a year of a presidential campaign in the United States, Jackson had not pressed greatly for the accomplishment of annexation because he feared such a course might prevent the election of his lieutenant, Van Buren, to succeed him in the presidency.[23]

Annexation of Texas was not seriously considered by the Van Buren administration[24] nor by the Tyler administration until 1844. Consequently between 1837 and 1844 Texas was not a subject of interest in Ashtabula County. In 1844 President Tyler learned that Great Britain and France were seriously considering guaranteeing Texan independence from Mexico, hitherto very precarious, in return for trading concessions. There was also some danger that British influence might secure the ending of slavery in Texas. To circumvent such possibilities Tyler and his secretary of state, John C. Calhoun, negotiated a treaty with Texas in April, 1844, whereby Texas would become a unit of the United States which would take possession of the Texan public lands and also assume

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[22] Sentinel, July 19, 1837.

[23] Bassett, Short History, 421-22, and Garrison, Westward Extension, 89-91.

[24] Garrison, Westward Extension, 92-95.

its public debt, thought to be about $10,000,000. However, as it was a presidential year the politicians in the United States Senate disliked taking so decided a step on such a controversial matter and the treaty was defeated.[25]

At this stage of annexation a mass meeting without stated political connection was held at Kingsville in Ashtabula County which defined its stand on the chief topic of the day. Resolutions adopted were:

1) the United States Constitution did not give the government the power to annex another nation,

2) the annexation of Texas would extend the power of slavery, and

3) annexation would be the signal for an unjust war upon Mexico.[26]

Apparently a very large fraction of the voters of the nation did not agree with Ashtabula County's citizens that Texas should not be annexed for Polk was elected president in 1844 upon a platform which advocated annexation. Believing that Polk's election signified a desire on the part of a majority of the voters that Texas be annexed President Tyler during the last few weeks of his authority led Congress to adopt a joint resolution which would annex Texas and make it a state as soon as Congress should approve its constitution. This resolution also provided that Texas, if its legislature consented, might be divided to form four additional states.[27] The possibility of five new slave states with

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[25] Bassett, Short History, 438-39, and Garrison, Westward Extension, 109-23.

[26] Sentinel, May 18, 1844.

[27] Bassett, Short History, 444, and Garrison, Westward Extension, 141-57.

representation in Congress was very unacceptable to the North, and especially New England, led by Webster and Adams, was bitterly hostile to annexation.

In Ashtabula County annexation continued to arouse opposition and after annexation was accomplished the war between the United States and Mexico which resulted from that act was denounced. One resolution approved by the Whig county convention in 1846 read:

> We execrate and abhor the unjust and aggressive war in which our nation is now engaged with a weak sister republic.[28]

At the same time that the annexation of Texas was arousing indignation in Ashtabula County an incident much nearer home caused several months of excitement among local opponents of slavery. In the late summer of 1845 three citizens of Ohio, Garner, Thomas, and Loraine, living in Washington County attempted to aid negroes belonging to a certain Harwood of Wood County, Virginia, to escape across the Ohio River. While the three were on the Ohio side of the river engaged in helping the negroes they were seized by six Virginians and carried across the river to Parkersburg, Virginia, and there placed in jail. The trial was to have been held in September but because of the illness of the prosecuting attorney of Wood County it was postponed until November. The prisoners were released on bail at $500 each.[29] The grand jury of Washington County, Ohio, indicted the Virginians for kidnaping and Governor Mordecai Bartley of Ohio sent a requisition for these Virginians to Governor

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[28] Sentinel, August 24, 1846.

[29] Ibid., September 16, 1845.

McDowell of Virginia.[30] Governor McDowell refused to surrender them at that time, giving as a reason that they were important witnesses in the trial of the three Ohioans then being held at Richmond.[31] In January following, the Sentinel contained its last reference to the incident when it copied news from the Marietta Intelligencer of January 22 that the three Ohioans had been released at Parkersburg on $100 bail each and that it was thought this was an admission by Virginia that it could not prove any violation of Virginian law by Ohioans acting on Ohio soil.[32]

An indignation meeting at New Lyme early in September, 1845, approved a resolution introduced by Lyman Peck:

> Resolved, that the state owes to its own sovereignty, to its own honor, to its own dignity, to its own citizens, and to the world, peremptorily to demand the restoration of the Ohioans to their full and unconditional liberty, and all those Virginians concerned in the abduction of those citizens of Ohio be forthwith demanded of the Executive of Virginia to be delivered up to Ohio to be tried for kidnaping.[33]

During this same month the Ashtabula County Whig Convention adopted a resolution introduced by Abner Kellogg which demanded reparation for the kidnaping of the three Ohioans to Virginia.[34]

No record shows that the Liberty men criticized the Whig Party or the Whig governor of Ohio, Mordecai Bartley, for the defense of the rights of the three Ohioans kidnaped to Virginia. On the subject of the

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[30] Sentinel, October 7, 1845.

[31] Ibid., December 23, 1845.

[32] Ibid., January 27, 1846.

[33] Ibid., September 16, 1845.

[34] Ibid., September 23, 1845.

repeal of the Ohio Black Laws the Liberty men were very critical of the course pursued by the Whigs. An Ohio law of 1804 forbade any Ohioan from employing any negro until the negro could produce a certificate of his freedom from the local county clerk, which would be granted only when he had a certificate of his freedom from the government of the slave state where he had resided. This law thus prohibited giving employment to a fugitive slave.[35]

The county convention of the Liberty Party held at Jefferson September 17, 1845 held the Whigs responsible for the presence on the statute books of Ohio of laws unfair to the negro. After nominating a state legislative ticket they adopted the following resolution:

> It is advisable to remind our Whig friends generally of their oft-repeated pledges last fall, that if in a majority, they would repeal all laws making distinctions on account of color; and our late senator [William L. Perkins of Painesville] particularly, that in his report upon the subject, he forget the important items, that the colored youth of Ohio who are directly interested in the school fund, are prohibited the enjoyment of the rights they possess by virtue of that interest; and while the colored citizens pay taxes to support the paupers among the whites, the poorhouses are sealed against their admission.[36]

Despite the tenor of this resolution the Whigs were trying to remove the disabilities placed by law upon colored people in Ohio. Brewster Randall of Conneaut, Ashtabula County's state representative, labored to secure the repeal of the law of 1804.[37] The Whig county convention of 1846 adopted a resolution:

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[35] Sentinel, March 2, 1846.

[36] Ibid., September 30, 1845.

[37] Ibid., March 2, 1846.

> Resolved, that we are opposed to the Black Laws of this state, and we call upon our brethren in other parts of the state, to aid us in wiping those odious relics of slaveholding tyranny from the statute book of our state.[38]

New state laws of 1847 helped negroes in the state by making it an offense to carry any free negro out of the state for the purpose of selling or placing him in slavery, the enforcement in Ohio of the fugitive slave act passed by Congress in February, 1793, was stopped by a law removing authority from judicial officers of Ohio to try cases under it, and an act providing that negroes could not testify in court was repealed.[39] In 1849 the remainder of the Black Laws were repealed.[40]

In the accomplishment of the repeal of the Black Laws the Liberty Party may possibly have done good through serving as a goad upon the Whigs. Some time had to pass, however, before the Liberty men organized under another name and with greater accessions of strength from the Whigs became the chief political party in the county.

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[38] Sentinel, August 24, 1846.

[39] Ibid., March 29, 1847.

[40] Ibid., February 10, 1849, and E. O. Randall and D. J. Ryan, History of Ohio, New York (1912-15), IV, 93-6.

CHAPTER V

AN ASHTABULA COUNTY WHIG IN WASHINGTON

In Joshua R. Giddings the congressional district of which Ashtabula County was a part possessed a representative who was not afraid to voice the anti-slavery sentiments of his constituents although for years they fell upon ears hostile, impatient, or unsympathetic. As a result of his consistent pursuance of this course he was often insulted and even threatened with physical harm. His constituents on the Western Reserve voted him nearly twenty-one years of congressional tenure because it was evident to them that it would be very difficult to find another representative who would represent them so effectively. Giddings was no more conspicuous in Washington for his hostility to slavery than was the Western Reserve notably outstanding in its hatred of slavery when compared with any other large section of Ohio.

Giddings was not entirely alone in the national capital as a fighter against slavery. There was a small group of northern congressmen among whom John Quincy Adams was the chief and also a small but efficient abolitionist lobby who cooperated with Giddings. Among the lobbyists for abolition Giddings was well acquainted with Theodore Weld and Joshua Leavitt who roomed in the same boarding-house with the Ashtabula congressman. The last mentioned three persons were much together. On New Year's Day 1842 the three went to President Tyler's levee and each avoided shaking the hand of "His Accidency."[1] Leavitt aided in effect-

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[1] Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld, and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844, New York and London (1934) 885.

ing an important modification of the nature of Giddings' work in Washington when he advised the latter to attack slavery directly on the floor of Congress instead of striking at it indirectly by trying to improve the condition of free labor and of the North in general through the enactment of bank and tariff legislation as Giddings had previously done.[2]

Giddings was well qualified by temperament and physique to stand out against southern congressmen who had come to expect northerners to surrender contested points. Weld said, "Giddings is fearless, self-possessed and not to be put down by threats or bluster."[3] Having this character and representing a constituency on the Western Reserve Giddings took a part in the petition war in the United States House of Representatives. In January, 1841, he presented to the House a petition from O. K. Hawley and forty others of Ashtabula County asking that the "gag" rule be repealed. This petition was tabled.[4] In February, 1842, he presented a petition from eighty citizens of Austinburg requesting Congress amicably to divide the Union by a line separating free from slave states. Giddings moved that the petition be referred to a special committee with instructions to report against it and to return their reasons for refusing it to the petitioners. The House by a vote of 116 to 24 refused to receive the petition. Most northern Whigs voted against receiving this petition and thus afforded some entertainment for southern supporters of the "gag." Kennedy of Maryland moved a resolution that any member introducing so extreme a petition in the future should be

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[2] Barnes and Dumond, Weld-Grimke Letters, 880.

[3] Ibid., 883.

[4] Sentinel, January 16, 1841.

liable to censure. However, Kennedy's resolution was not received.[5]

Early in 1842 John Quincy Adams had presented a petition from Haverhill, Massachusetts, requesting that Congress dissolve the Union. Adams had moved that the petition be referred to a special committee with instructions to deny it and to return the reasons for its denial to the petitioners. Giddings noticed in a newspaper a copy of resolutions passed by the Ohio Legislature which severely censured Adams' conduct in this matter. Giddings then sent a letter to the Ohio Legislature explaining that Adams did not favor the dissolution of the Union but merely wished to defend the right of petitioning the House. Giddings pointed out that southern congressmen had tried to carry a vote of censure of Adams and that the Ohio Legislature by its censure of Adams had alligned itself with the pro-slavery element in the House of Representatives. He said that he himself had recently introduced a petition from his own district which greatly resembled the one responsible for the censure of Adams. Giddings said that the man who had forwarded the petition to him was an acquaintance of long standing and a man whom he regarded as being of the highest type. This person had sent him a letter with the petition that the Union be divided. In part this letter read:

> If our petitions are to be treated with open and malignant insult, and we ourselves held up to the world as incendiaries and fanatics; if the federal government is to go on, year after year, increasing its efforts to sustain the system of slavery by the aid of the money, the power, and the influence of the nation at large then we ask (and we ask sincerely too) for a division.[7]

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[5] Sentinel, March 12, 1842, and the Congressional Globe, 27 Cong., 2 Sess., 268.

[6] Cong. Globe, 27 Cong., 2 Sess., 168.

[7] Sentinel, March 26, 1842.

To Giddings the efforts of southerners and northern apologists for slavery in the House of Representatives to stifle discussion of the evils of slavery through limitation of the right of petition seemed an attempt to deprive northern freemen of an old right. He was very indignant over other wrongs inflicted upon the North by the pro-slavery interests. He fought with all his power bills appropriating the nation's money to wage the Seminole War, to remove the conquered Seminoles to areas west of the Mississippi, and to pension soldiers of that war. He repeatedly told the North from the floor of the House that the Seminole War during the 1830's and the early 1840's was waged to recapture fugitive slaves hiding among the swamps of Florida.[8] He held that it was very wrong to molest these Indians for the purpose of regaining fugitives but it was even more unjust to tax the North to pay for this slaveholders' war.[9]

Giddings feared that a much more serious war might result between the United States and Great Britain if this nation sought to secure payment from the latter country for all the human property of slaveholders which became free through the operation of British laws. This fear was grounded on the cases of the "Comet" and the "Encomium." The two ships, the "Comet" and the "Encomium," carrying slaves from Alexandria, Virginia, to New Orleans were wrecked on islands of the Bahama group. The persons who salvaged these ships took the slaves to Nassau, chief city of the Bahama Islands, where they became free as a result of setting foot on British soil. President Jackson appointed Martin Van

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[8] George W. Julian, The Life of Joshua R. Giddings, Chicago (1892), 92-99.

[9] Sentinel, February 27, 1841.

Buren special agent to try to secure payment for these liberated slaves from the British government and the latter was successful in his negotiations, securing $115,000.[10] On February 13, 1843, Giddings moved a reconsideration of a bill which would pay this sum to the former owners of the slaves. He stated that he saw no reason why Great Britain might not be sued even to the point of war for payment for the 15,000 negroes who to that date had been freed by escape to Canada.[11]

Giddings attracted nation-wide attention by the part he took in the discussion in Congress of the "Creole" incident. The "Creole" was a ship engaged in the coastal slave trade. In 1841 a cargo of slaves aboard this ship being taken from Norfolk, Virginia, to New Orleans mutinied, killed the white men in charge of their transportation, and sailed the ship to Nassau in the Bahamas where they became freemen under the flag of Great Britain.[12] This affair was maddening to southerners and Giddings drew their intense hatred by championing the right of the slaves aboard the "Creole" to obtain their natural state of freedom even though it had cost the lives of some slave-drivers. On March 21, 1842, Giddings introduced the following resolutions in the House of Representatives:

1) slavery could exist only by virtue of positive municipal law. Where no such laws were in effect every person not in prison was free,

2) when slaves left the waters of a state they were under the laws of the United States, which did not declare slavery to be a national institution,

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[10] Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 291-92.

[11] Sentinel, March 11, 1843.

[12] David S. Muzzey, History of the American People, Boston, New York (1934), 295, and Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 294-95.

3) the slaves aboard the Creole were merely engaged in regaining their natural state of freedom and therefore committed no crimes,

4) attempts to regain possession of the Creole slaves were not authorized by the United States Constitution,

5) attempts to exert the national influence in favor of the coastwise slave trade were inimical to the rights of the free states.[13]

Each of these resolutions was highly objectionable to the southerners in the House but the third aroused the most ire. Congressman Botts of Virginia drew up a resolution of censure of Giddings but he was unable to introduce it at that time because his state had already been passed for the duration of a week in the introduction of resolutions. He, therefore, gave his resolution to Congressman Weller of Ohio who introduced it. Giddings tried to obtain the floor in order to defend himself but the previous question was called for at once and he was given no opportunity for self-defense. The resolution of censure was passed by a vote of 125 to 69.[14] Giddings resigned at once[15] and announced that he would seek reelection.[16] He hurried to his district and on April 5 spoke in his home town, Jefferson, explaining his course in the Creole case and asking reelection.[17] Public meetings held at the county seats of the four counties of his district commended him and declared a determination to send him back to Congress. These meetings

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[13] Cong. Globe, 27 Cong., 2 Sess., 342.

[14] Ibid., 342, 344-46.

[15] Ibid., 349; Julian, Life of Giddings, 114-25.

[16] Sentinel, April 2, 1842.

[17] Ibid., April 9, 1842.

were held at Warren, Trumbull County, March 30,[18] Chardon, Geauga County, April 1,[19] Painesville, Lake County, April 6,[20] and at Jefferson, Ashtabula County, April 11. At the Jefferson meeting the last resolution was introduced by B. F. Wade and it read:

> Resolved that the Honorable J. R. Giddings on return to Congress be, and he is hereby instructed at the first moment that it shall be in order, to introduce the same resolutions over again, and insist that the House of Representatives act upon them by a direct vote.[21]

Any possible doubt that Giddings did not have the support of a great majority of his constituents must have been dispelled by the tone of approval of his actions given by public gatherings in his district and by the returns of the special election held April 26 which effected his prompt reappearance in Congress. The district gave Giddings 7469 votes and his Democratic opponent 3943 votes.[22]

Giddings' reelection in April, 1842, was very important because it proved that so large an area in the North as a congressional district would easily reelect a representative who emphatically denounced the many evils of slavery as they were evident to him. Also, it vindicated the course pursued by more Whigs than Giddings alone in defying the policy of the Whig organization in the House of frowning upon insurgency on slavery issues. Adams and Giddings had been made to feel that

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[18] Sentinel, April 9, 1842.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., April 16, 1842.

[21] Ibid., April 16, 1842.

[22] Ibid., May 7, 1842.

they were in danger of being cast out of the Whig Party if they continued to agitate the issue. Giddings' reelection determined that anti-slavery warfare might continue to be waged by insurgent Whigs without great danger of their political destruction. It guaranteed a promising political future for the anti-slavery movement on a large scale.

Giddings not only wished to limit slavery through congressional legislation but on several occasions he went out of his way to render personal aid to unfortunate negroes near him. On these occasions he demonstrated that his interest in the movement to grant human rights to the slaves was not merely academic, but also heartfelt. At one time a negro named Henry Wilson worked in the boarding house at which Giddings lived in Washington. When Wilson had paid his owner about four-fifths of the price of his freedom his owner resold him. Giddings had much respect for this negro's personal worth and busied himself to collect the balance of the money required to free him. He succeeded in this endeavor by himself contributing five dollars and by obtaining an equal sum from each of his friends in the House of Representatives.[23] On another occasion seventy-seven negro slaves in Washington who had been sold South got possession of a vessel and escaped nearly to the mouth of the Potomac River before they were recaptured. They were brought back to Washington and placed in jail. Giddings went to the jail and assured them that he would defend them to the best of his legal ability. His mission to the jail became known and a pro-slavery mob collected outside and threatened to do him violence although he finally was able to leave in safety. On the day after the slaves were imprisoned

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[23] Sentinel, February 21, 1848.

Giddings asked permission of the House to introduce resolutions that the slaves had committed no crime and that a committee of the House be appointed to learn by what authority they were confined and to recommend legislation to correct the situation. Permission to introduce these resolutions was not granted by the House.[24]

Giddings was a radical opponent of slavery in the 1840's but he was not one of those who believed that the United States Constitution must be destroyed in order that slavery might be ended. He had taken an oath to support the Constitution and he was firm in his determination to observe that oath. Consequently he did not agree with Miss Abby Kelley of the American Anti-Slavery Society when she denounced the Constitution in a speech at Jefferson, May 31, 1845. In her speech she said:

> We of the American Anti-Slavery Society consider it is sustaining slavery to vote at all, because by so doing you support the Constitution, which requires the free states to give up fugitives -- to bury our bayonets in the breast of the slave. Hence we hold it not right to cast a vote at all under the United States Constitution.[25]

Giddings believed that slavery existed in the nation not because the Constitution sanctioned it but because the South wrongfully practiced it in defiance of the Constitution. Giddings considered the United States Constitution an anti-slavery document. He said:

> For the union with those slave states, who have thus defeated the great and paramount objects of our confederation; subverted the Constitution, waged war against the rights of mankind I entertain no attachment. Give me Constitutional Union or give me dissolution.[26]

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[24] Sentinel, April 29, 1848.

[25] Ibid., June 12, 1845.

[26] Ibid., September 23, 1845.

Giddings appears to have been a very high type of representative. He commanded the respect and enjoyed the confidence of his constituents, he repeatedly braved a variety of oppositions in Washington ranging from criticism to the menace of physical violence to speak the sentiments of his district, he was deeply concerned with the welfare of the entire nation, he conscientiously observed his oath of office. If so scrupulous a statesman should ever see fit to leave one party to join another there certainly must be abundant cause.

CHAPTER VI

GIDDINGS AND ASHTABULA COUNTY LEAVE THE WHIG PARTY

In 1844 Giddings was a member of the Whig Party. His outspoken criticism of slavery for its manifold evils upon such an occasion as his resolutions in the Creole incident had caused him to be regarded as rather insurgent in Washington but in his district and in his state he was a Whig in good standing. His party regularity at that time is exemplified by his support of Henry Clay for the presidency.[1] He approved Clay's candidacy because the latter had long labored for a high tariff and extensive improvement of rivers and harbors. Although he did not approve of Clay's record as a duellist he did not consider it a very great disqualification as did the Liberty Party.[2] Evidence that he was highly esteemed by Whigs of Ohio outside his own county is supplied by recommendations of newspapers of Northern Ohio that he be the Whig candidate for the governorship that year. The Sentinel discouraged this project because it thought he would be able to accomplish more as a congressman.[3] At the end of 1848 Giddings was no longer a Whig. Events during these four years convinced him that the Whig Party had lost its usefulness to the nation. He broke with the Whigs because he believed they did not try wholeheartedly to prevent the annexation of Texas or the prosecution of the war against Mexico.

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[1] Julian, Life of Giddings, 159-68.

[2] Sentinel, August 10, 1844.

[3] Ibid., February 3, 1844.

As early as March 3, 1843 a group of thirteen congressmen almost anticipated President Tyler's thoughts and issued an address "To the People of the Free States of the Union" warning them that the slaveholding interests were about to annex Texas to the United States, and resolving that it was unconstitutional for Congress to annex a foreign state. They recommended that the people of the free states not submit to this pro-slavery scheme. Of the thirteen signatures to this address the first was that of John Quincy Adams and the fifth that of Joshua R. Giddings.[4]

In January, 1845, when, owing to the election of Polk, annexation seemed very probable Giddings in a speech before the House gave the following arguments against annexation:

1) the United States would become burdened with the Texan national debt estimated at from ten to fifty millions of dollars,

2) in 1840 Texas had made a treaty with Great Britain which provided that Texas should levy the same tariff upon British manufactures that Britain levied upon Texan sugar and cotton. Annexation would necessarily terminate this treaty, possibly to the offense of Great Britain,

3) it would greatly strengthen the institution of slavery in the United States. On this point he said:

> But this question of annexation is merely a collateral consideration. It is sought only as the means of attaining the ulterior objects of sustaining slavery in Texas, the slave trade between our slaveholding states and the people of that government; of perpetuating that institution in the southern States of this Union and giving to those States a preponderance of political power..... The declaration of Lord Brougham in the House of Lords 'that the abolition of

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[4] Sentinel, May 27, 1843, and Garrison, Westward Extension, 141.

> slavery in Texas would cut off the market for slaves now sent from the slavebreeding States of this Union to Texas, and thereby tend to the ultimate abolition of slavery in those states' is referred to and dwelt upon by the honorable secretary [Calhoun] as a circumstance of an 'alarming character.'[5]

4) it would make the defense of the United States more difficult because the presence of a large number of slaves was an element of weakness in time of war or invasion.

5) it would increase the deficit in the finances of the postal department possibly $300,000 annually. Postal service in the South resulted in a loss to the government whereas in the North revenues equaled expenses.

6) although it had been asserted that the sale of the Texan public lands would pay the Texan public debt this would not happen because the sale of public lands in the South was usually not profitable for the government.[6]

Giddings' sentiments concerning the iniquity of the plan to annex Texas were not widely held in Congress for Texas was annexed and in December, 1845, became a state in the Union. When the movements of General Zachary Taylor's army in the area between the Nueces and the Rio Grande Rivers whose ownership was disputed between the United States and Mexico caused the Mexicans to attack and capture a small force of American soldiers war swiftly followed.[7] Giddings showed that there was real strength within his convictions for he was one of fourteen congressmen who voted against declaring war upon Mexico in May 1846.[8]

Giddings not only opposed the commencing of the war against

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[5] Cong. Globe, 28 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 343.

[6] Sentinel, February 28, 1845.

[7] Bassett, Short History, 446-47.

[8] Sentinel, June 8, 1846, and Julian, Life of Giddings, 191-92.

Mexico but he also labored to halt this nation's prosecution of the war during 1846 and 1847. He contended that the Polk Administration had seriously violated the Constitution and as the Constitution was a contract between the states it no longer bound Ohio to respect or aid the pro-slavery states. His words on this contention were:

> Without further remark I repeat, that our Union of 1787 has been entirely dissolved: and that the people of our state having at all times refused their consent to such dissolution, are now absolved from all further political obligations toward those states which have united in the political confederation with Texas.[9]

On this same occasion he declared that the new United States senators and representatives from Texas could not comply with the Constitutional requirement that a United States senator must have been a citizen of the United States nine years and a representative a citizen seven years. He advocated that the Northern states refuse to send representatives to Congress to sit in what he considered a new confederation with a former foreign power and also refuse to take any part in fighting Mexico. He was confident that the pursuance of this course by the free states would compel the administration to give up the war.[10]

The war continued and Giddings continued to represent his district in Washington. He thought in March, 1847, that the Whigs in Congress were going to earnestly oppose the war by refusing to vote for military appropriations but this desired development did not take place.[11] In December, 1847, Giddings did not support Robert Winthrop of Massa-

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[9] Sentinel, July 13, 1846.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., March 22, 1847.

chusetts, the Whig candidate for the speakership in the House of Representatives because the latter had worked hard in the Whig caucus to get all the congressmen of that party to support the war against Mexico.[12]

Giddings considered that the addition of slave territory in Texas to the Union should be balanced by the acquisition of areas which should eventually become free states. In January, 1846, it seemed to him that the Democrats were seeking to evade the fulfillment of their promise at the Baltimore Convention of 1844 to add both Texas and Oregon to the domain of the United States. He said that now that the South had acquired Texas little action would be taken by Polk to obtain a fair share of Oregon. Giddings held that this nation's share of the Oregon Territory consisted of the entire region.[13]

The ownership of Oregon had been a subject of mild dispute between the United States and Great Britain for several decades previous to the presidency of Polk. In 1818 when the boundary between Canada and the United States from the Lake of the Woods to the summit of the Rocky Mountains was fixed at 49° North Latitude the government of the United States had been willing to continue this boundary line westward to the Pacific Coast through the Oregon region. The British had not agreed to this solution of the problem because they wished the boundary to follow the Columbia River. The Oregon region, consisting of what is at present the province of British Columbia, the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho and parts of Montana and Wyoming, was left open to settlement by both British and citizens of the United States for a period of ten years.

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[12] Sentinel, December 27, 1847, and Julian, Life of Giddings, 216-38.

[13] Sentinel, January 20, 1846, and Julian, Life of Giddings, 185-91.

At the end of these ten years in 1828 the joint occupation agreement was continued for an indefinite period. By 1843 when the pro-slavery interests recommenced agitation that Texas be annexed to the United States the people along the Mississippi River who had trading connections with Oregon were advancing the idea that their nation should acquire all of that territory as far north as 54°40' North Latitude.[14]

Much to their dissatisfaction when President Polk turned his attention to the situation in 1845 he suggested that the boundary be placed at 49° North Latitude. After much hesitation Congress in April, 1846, decided to follow Polk's recommendations that notice be given Great Britain of the termination of the joint occupation of Oregon and that the authority of this nation be extended over it. Great Britain did not care to risk losing all Oregon and so a treaty was made dividing the region at 49°.[15] Giddings could not have been greatly pleased by this outcome for he had advocated a war against Great Britain for the ownership of all Oregon to 54°40'. He said that the successful prosecution of such a war would give the United States an opportunity to conquer all Canada from which at least six free states might be formed to counterbalance the annexation of Texas.[16]

The members of the Whig Party of Ashtabula County fully shared in their congressman's opposition to the annexation of Texas and the waging of a pro-slavery war against Mexico but quite possibly a majority

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[14] Bassett, Short History, 440-41, and Garrison, Westward Extension, 160-69.

[15] Bassett, Short History, 445, and Garrison, Westward Extension, 169-74.

[16] Sentinel, January 20, 1846.

of them would have remained in their old political allegiance had not Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore been forced upon them as the candidates of the Whig Party in 1848 for the offices respectively of president and vice-president of the nation. Fillmore was unacceptable to them because he had not opposed slavery during his service as a Whig leader in the House of Representatives but had tried to keep the Whig Party above sectionalism. They had numerous reasons for considering Taylor unworthy to hold the high office of president: he was inexperienced and unknown in politics and government, in fact it was not even certain that he was a Whig; he had refused to state his opinions on such topics of national interest as the morality and legality of slavery and the extension of slavery into the territories west of the Mississippi River; he had declined to commit himself in regard to any policies he would follow in the event he should be elected; he had taken a leading part in waging an unnecessary war upon a weak nation; and he owned a plantation in Louisiana and many slaves.

An editorial notice in the Sentinel which announced a Whig meeting to be held at Jefferson, June 19, 1848, read in part:

> Let us then decide whether a man whose hands are dripping with the blood of murder, whose garments are all polluted with the crimes of slavery, and who holds no principles in common with ourselves, shall receive support at our hands, for the office of President of the United States.[17]

This uncomplimentary reference to General Taylor left no doubt of the deep disapproval of his candidacy which the Sentinel was to express throughout the campaign of 1848.

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[17] Sentinel, June 17, 1848.

The Whigs who would not support Taylor for the presidency saw no opportunity for improving their right to vote by bolting to the Democrats. The Democratic presidential nominee was a northerner, Lewis Cass of Michigan, who had earned the confidence of the slave power by the pro-slavery sympathies he had manifested during a long political career as member of the cabinet and of Congress. The northerner might be uncertain as to Taylor's opinions regarding slavery but he knew definitely that Cass would not oppose slavery in the least. When the Whigs assembled at Jefferson in obedience to the above-mentioned notice the majority rejected both Taylor and Cass as unworthy of their support by adopting the following resolution:

> Resolved, that in the nomination of Lewis Cass and Zachary Taylor, by their respective parties, we behold the crowning triumph of the slaveholding influence of the country, that is now engaged in the diabolical project of extending the curse of slaveholding institutions from the Atlantic to the Pacific over the fairest and richest territory of the Western Continent.[18]

When R. W. Griswold presented resolutions that the convention approve the nominations of Taylor and Fillmore they were rejected.[19]

The Whigs of the county were now at the fork in the road. It seemed that they must either violate their anti-slavery principles by voting for Taylor or else become insurgents from their national party organization. Only a minority of them remained loyal to the party. This minority, led during the few remaining years of the existence of the Whig Party by R. W. Griswold, C. S. Simonds, and Darius Cadwell, was of no

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[18] Sentinel, June 24, 1848.

[19] Ibid.

great importance in the political history of the county. The Whig Party had been found wanting as a means of combating slavery and the majority of the citizens of the county regarded party welfare as less important than the advancement of the fortunes of the anti-slavery movement.

CHAPTER VII

THE FREE SOIL PARTY TAKES THE LEAD IN ASHTABULA COUNTY POLITICS

By 1848 thousands of Whigs throughout the North had become convinced that they could no longer effectually resist the spread of slavery into the territories of the United States through membership in the Whig Party. It appeared necessary to them to form a third party which should base its existence and its chances for obtaining the control of the government upon the ground of opposition to the further extension of slavery into the territories. They would forget such issues as the tariff and succeed or fail on this one great issue.

On February 28, 1848, Giddings prophesied this important political development when he said in part in a speech in the House:

> I now hazard the declaration that on this principle of opposing all attempts of the Federal Government to extend and uphold that institution [slavery] against all interference .... beyond that which is provided for in the Constitution, is now based a party, or the germ of a party, that will at no distant day become dominant in this nation. That party, call it what you may, will occupy the ground maintained by the Whigs in 1844, and will oppose all propagandism of slavery, and all attempts to throw its burdens, its disgrace, or its guilt upon the people of the free states. The old issues between the parties are lost sight of; they are in fact forgotten. Who now speaks of a protective tariff? Who in this hall attempts to illustrate its benefits to the free labor of the North? Or who complains of its burdens upon the slave labor of the South? Who now occupies time on the subject of harbor or river improvements? We have no funds for such purposes. They are absorbed

in a war waged for the extension of slavery.[1]

This new party was formed in 1848 and was called the Free Soil Party. Throughout the North it was composed of former Liberty men, radical Whigs, and radical Democrats who believed that slavery should be debarred from the territories acquired from Mexico as a result of the Mexican War. Radical anti-slavery Democrats who refused to support the regular Democratic presidential nominee, Lewis Cass, met at Utica, New York, in the summer of 1848 and nominated Martin Van Buren for the presidency.[2] The formation of the Free Soil Party took place in a national political convention which assembled at Buffalo August 9, 1848 in which the Liberty men and anti-slavery Whigs joined the anti-slavery Democrats and nominated Van Buren for the presidency and for the vice-presidency, Charles Francis Adams of Massachusetts.[3]

This Free Soil Convention was attended by a delegation from Ashtabula County. Lynds Jones, usually called Judge Jones, was at the head of the delegation.[4] During Van Buren's term as president, from 1837 to 1841, the Ashtabula Sentinel had censured him for nearly every official act he had done. It had considered him to be much too sympathetic toward the slave interests. In 1844 when Van Buren had made an unsuccessful effort to win the Democratic presidential nomination he had showed less interest in the welfare of slavery. In 1848 the Sentinel

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[1] Sentinel, March 27, 1848, and Cong. Globe, 30 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 380.

[2] Garrison, Westward Extension, 281.

[3] Bassett, Short History, 452; Garrison, Westward Extension, 281-83; Smith, Liberty and Free Soil Parties, 138-43.

[4] Sentinel, August 12, 1848.

unreservedly supported his candidacy. Van Buren and Adams easily carried Ashtabula County in the election of November 7[5] but the electoral vote of Ohio went to Cass. Van Buren did not receive the electoral vote of any state.[6] In the election of 1848 the Free Soilers of Ashtabula County supported the Whig county and state tickets and the two were successful for the last time.

The county Free Soil organization received important accessions not only from among the rank and file of the Whigs and Democrats but also from among the leaders. Thus when a Free Soil Convention was held at Columbus, December 28 and 29, 1848, the two delegates from Ashtabula County in attendance were Brewster Randall of Conneaut, speaker of the Ohio Senate, and N. L. Chaffee of Geneva, state representative from the county, both of whom had been nominated and elected to their legislative offices as Whigs.[7] An outstanding Democrat who became a Free Soiler was Laban S. Sherman whom the new party elected prosecuting attorney in 1849 and state senator in 1851 and 1853.

Ashtabula County Free Soilers held important positions in the Western Reserve Free Soil Convention held at Cleveland in May, 1849. E. B. Woodbury was the presiding officer and L. S. Sherman and J. R. Giddings served on the resolutions committee. In a speech before this convention Giddings made the charge that President Taylor had done more in his first four weeks as chief magistrate to reward Northern traitors who had upheld slavery in the District of Columbia than had ever Jackson

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[5] Sentinel, November 11, 1848.

[6] Bassett, Short History, 452.

[7] Sentinel, January 20, 1849.

or Polk.[8]

The year 1849 witnessed the firm establishment of the Free Soil organization in the county. The party held its first nominating convention at Jefferson on August 13. G. W. St. John, a former pillar in the anti-slavery and Liberty Party organizations, presided over the meeting. Brewster Randall was nominated for another term in the Ohio Senate.[9] The Sentinel enthusiastically supported the Free Soil ticket by advertisement and editorial and declined to help the "Taylor Hunker Whigs" in the least. The minority of Whigs who did not leave that party in 1848 were called "Hunkers" because the Free Soilers believed their hunger for office rather than a sincere acceptance of the principles of the Whig Party restrained them from becoming Free Soilers. The Free Soil organization won a decisive victory in its first local contest, a sample result of the county balloting on October 9, being that for the office of prosecuting attorney in which L. S. Sherman [Free Soil] received 2060 votes, C. S. Simonds [Whig] 1440 votes, and E. Lee [Democrat] 534 votes.[10]

Another test of strength for the new party occurred in a campaign during March and April, 1850, leading to the election of three delegates to attend the Ohio Constitutional Convention to be held at Columbus. Early in March the Free Soilers met at Jefferson and nominated E. B. Woodbury of that place and B. B. Hunter of Trumbull. Ashtabula and Lake Counties jointly were to send three delegates. The third delegate

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[8] Sentinel, May 5, 1849.

[9] Ibid., August 18, 1849.

[10] Ibid., October 13, 1849.

on the Free Soil ticket was H. C. Gray of Lake County. Later in the month the Whigs met, also at Jefferson, and decided to attempt to beat the Free Soilers by effecting a temporary coalition with the Democrats. The originator of this scheme was C. S. Simonds. Accordingly, as this plan was acceptable to the Democrats of the two counties, the Ashtabula County Whigs nominated Horace Wilder, a Conneaut lawyer, and O. H. Fitch of Jefferson, a leader of the county bar,[11] while the Lake County Democratic Convention nominated Zenas Blish.[12] The Whig-Democratic combination was not successful, however, the election results being:[13]

	Woodbury	Hunter	Gray	Wilder	Fitch	Blish
Ashtabula	2106	2189	2117	1760	1736	1856
Lake	984	987	993	1110	1099	1132

Having proved that they were the most powerful political group in the County the Free Soilers began to concern themselves with issues of a nation-wide scope. Their county convention of September, 1850, devoted itself to an evaluation of the group of measures recently enacted by Congress under the popular collective title of "the Compromise of 1850." This group of laws attempted to quiet the popular agitation regarding slavery by making concessions both to the slaveholding interests and to the opponents of slavery. All provisions in the compromise which were concessions to the South were intensely unpopular among the Free Soilers. The resolutions committee of this convention, consisting of J. J. Elwell, E. B. Woodbury, C. W. St. John, D. P. Alford, and Robert

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[11] Sentinel, March 23, 1850.

[12] Ibid., March 30, 1850.

[13] Ibid., April 6, 1850.

Lyon, condemned the pro-slavery features of the compromise by resolving that

1) Congress had erred in establishing territorial governments for New Mexico and Utah without excluding slavery from them

2) Congress should not have paid $10,000,000 to settle the public debt of Texas,

3) the Fugitive Slave Act was anti-republican, anti-Christian, unconstitutional, contrary to every principle of humanity, and not to be enforced by the aid of any freeman of Ohio, and that

4) the Fugitive Slave Act should be repealed at once.[14]

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 had aroused unlimited criticism and hostility in the North. It was not the first legislation of this nature for a fugitive act had been enacted by Congress in 1793 which had not been effective because it depended mainly upon state agencies for its enforcement and the Northern states had not been inclined to enforce it. For several reasons the act of 1850 was much more stringent and effective: it employed the law enforcement machinery of the national government, it imposed a heavy fine upon any officer of the United States who should allow a fugitive to escape or to be taken from his custody, a recaptured fugitive was not permitted to testify in his own defense nor to have a jury trial, the judge presiding over the trial received twice as large a fee for recommitting a slave to bondage as he received for declaring him free, and officers were empowered to summon all citizens to aid them effect a recapture if necessary.[15]

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[14] Sentinel, September 21, 1850.

[15] Hussey, American People, 316.

Through silence the county convention apparently gave approval to the provisions in the compromise which abolished the slave trade in the District of Columbia and admitted California to the Union without slavery. Henry Fassett, editor of the Sentinel, was one of the two secretaries of the convention. The central committee chosen for the following year consisted of O. W. St. John, Richard Tinan, Abner Kellogg, Hiram Plumb, and N. E. French.[16]

A Free Soil meeting at Trumbull on October 7, 1850, declared in no uncertain terms its opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act in the following resolution:

> Resolved, that among us the panting fugitive from the land of whips and chains, shall find a welcome and sure retreat; and we do hereby publish to the world, that it is our fixed determination, should the trembling bondsman take shelter beneath our roofs, we will defend him if necessary even unto death.[17]

This meeting expressed continued confidence in Giddings by resolving "That we tender to the Honorable J. R. Giddings our most hearty thanks for his firm, uncompromising opposition to the encroachments of the slave power on the rights of the North."[18]

The Whigs held their county convention at Jefferson on September 23, 1850. They nominated the same persons for the offices of auditor, recorder, and two-year-term poor director as had the Free Soilers one week previously but made separate nominations for all other offices. Their resolutions concerning the Compromise of 1850 did not differ

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[16] Sentinel, September 21, 1850.

[17] Ibid., October 12, 1850.

[18] Ibid.

essentially from those of the Free Soilers.[19]

In the election, held on October 8, 1850, the entire county ticket of the Free Soilers was elected. The safe lead which the county Free Soil organization had over the two older parties is indicated by the vote cast for the governorship of which Smith [Free Soil] received 1774 votes, Johnson [Whig] 1281 votes, and Wood [Democrat] 667 votes. Giddings was easily returned to Congress by his district.[20]

Meanwhile, Giddings continued to assail slavery from his place in Congress. In a speech in December, 1850, he attacked President Fillmore for signing the Fugitive Slave Act. He did not even credit Fillmore with originality in making this error but claimed that the president was under the influence of his secretary of state, Daniel Webster.[21] For many years Webster had been the idol of the North because of his eloquent criticism of the nullification spirit of South Carolina in the early 1830's but he lost much of his popularity when on March 7, 1850, he spoke in the Senate in favor of the compromise measures.[22]

In addition to Giddings and the citizenry of Ashtabula County the entire Western Reserve hated the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. In May, 1851, Giddings, B. B. Hunter, and Lucretius Bissell represented Ashtabula County in a meeting held at Painesville to protest against the

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[19] Sentinel, September 28, 1850.

[20] Ibid., October 12, 1850.

[21] Ibid., January 4, 1851.

[22] Bassett, Short History, 457, and Garrison, Westward Extension, 324-26.

enforcement of the act. One resolution of this meeting read: "Resolved, that we rejoice in the election of Charles Sumner to the United States Senate; that it is a glorious comment on the conduct of Webster, and the operation of the Lower Law, in the remanding of Sims to a life of bondage."[23] Charles Sumner recently elected a United States senator from Massachusetts was expected to prove to be a valuable fighter against slavery. The fugitive act was sometimes called the "Lower Law." Sims was a recaptured fugitive slave who was so diligently guarded by the federal authorities that white sympathizers were unable to free him. Usually fugitive slaves were not recaptured and often when they were apprehended anti-slavery mobs would take them from their captors and send them to Canada and liberty.[24] The Free Soilers of Ashtabula County were in hearty agreement with Editor J. A. Giddings of the Sentinel when in March 1851 he stated in his paper his approval of the action of a Boston mob in taking Shadrach, a fugitive slave, from officers of the United States and sending him to Canada.[25]

Despite northern hatred of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 which rendered the act of little practical effect there was a great subsidence in the agitation against slavery from 1850 until 1854. Economic conditions were good during this period and both the Whig and Democratic Parties were desirous that trouble over slavery should cease and be forgotten.[26] Congressman Giddings, however, was unwilling that the nation

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[23] Sentinel, May 17, 1851.

[24] Bassett, Short History, 486.

[25] Sentinel, March 1, 1851.

[26] Bassett, Short History, 485, and Theodore Clarke Smith, Parties and Slavery, New York and London (1906), 14-28.

should enjoy peace.[27] On June 23, 1852, he attempted to revive the slavery issues in a speech before the House of Representatives. He quoted the Democratic platform of 1852 as saying that the Democrats would "resist" all attempts to renew agitation of the slavery issues and the Whig platform as declaring that the Whigs would "discountenance" all such endeavors. He announced to the Democrats of the House that he was at that moment preparing to agitate the question of the morality of slavery and inquired what they would do to resist such an activity. He specifically asked Congressman Olds of the district about Circleville, Ohio what he would do as a Democrat to resist. When Olds said that he would vote against suspending the rules of the House "for the introduction of the apple of discord" Giddings ridiculed him and appeared to be far from at his best.[28]

The Whigs of Ashtabula County were very bitter over Giddings' desertion to the Free Soil Party. In 1852 they made a most strenuous effort to defeat him. One resolution of the Whig County Convention which met at Jefferson on September 20, 1852, read in part:

> Resolved that the course pursued by J. R. Giddings, for the last four years, toward the Whigs, his abandonment of the protective policy; his swindles upon the Treasury, in taking extra mileage, ... all give the lie to his high-sounding profession for freedom and humanity.[29]

The charge of extra mileage was used to the limit by the Whigs. Several days before the congressional election of October, 1852, the Conneaut

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[27] Smith, Parties and Slavery, 22, and Julian, Life of Giddings, 283.

[28] Sentinel, July 10, 1852, and Cong. Globe, 32 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 738.

[29] Sentinel, October 2, 1852.

Reporter, a Whig paper never friendly toward Giddings, put out a large number of handbills bearing a copy of a letter from Elisha Whittlesey, Comptroller of the Treasurer and former Whig congressman from the district of which Ashtabula County was a part, stating that he, Whittlesey, had never approved Giddings' current mileage to Washington of 850 miles. The Sentinel then published a letter from Giddings to the voters of his district in which he explained the affair and sought to uphold his integrity. Giddings' letter stated that when he succeeded Whittlesey as congressman in 1838 the latter's mileage was 480 miles. Until 1845 Giddings' mileage was 527 miles; in that year it was increased to 850 miles because recent improvements in transportation had shifted the best route from the shores of the Great Lakes to Washington to a course through Buffalo and New York. This route was thus nearly twice as long as the route passing through Pittsburgh which had been followed until 1845. He mentioned a letter which he had received early in 1849 from Thomas J. Henly of Indiana who was then a member of the committee on mileage which stated that although congressmen along the lake shores and west of the Great Lakes probably received too much mileage it was not to their discredit because Congress had thus far neglected to correct the condition. Whittlesey admitted that since he became comptroller in 1848 he had examined the mileage of the representatives. Giddings felt justified in claiming that the only reason his mileage had not been approved by the comptroller was that the latter had been very negligent. Giddings and the Sentinel were greatly incensed by Whittlesey's attempt to discredit the county's representative in Congress and also by its timing which was immediately before the election to prevent Giddings if possible from

[34] Ibid., August 14, 1852.

presenting an adequate defense.[30] The Whig strategy failed, for the district, consisting in 1852 of Ashtabula, Trumbull, and Mahoning Counties gave Giddings 5764 votes while his opponents, Woods [Democrat] received 4427 votes and Newton [Whig, and for many years Whittlesey's law partner] received 4147 votes.[31]

The continued vigor of the Free Soil Party in the county was made evident by its success in securing electoral pluralities for its nominees for county and state offices. In 1851 it nominated such leaders as L. S. Sherman for the position of state senator, Samuel Plumb for state representative, Henry Fassett for county treasurer, Abner Kellogg to be county clerk, and J. J. Elwell county commissioner.[32] The Free Soilers enjoyed another triumph at the polls, a representative result being that for the office of prosecuting attorney for which office S. P. Jones [Free Soil] received 1743 votes, Darius Cadwell [Whig] 1455 votes, and E. Lee [Democrat] 590 votes. The entire Free Soil ticket was elected with the exception of Henry Fassett, who intermittently had been the editor of the Sentinel for many years.[33]

The following year, 1852, was a presidential year. G. W. St. John represented the Free Soilers of Ashtabula County in the national convention of the Free Soil Party held at Pittsburgh.[34] This convention nominated for the presidency Senator John P. Hale of New Hampshire who

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[30] Sentinel, October 9, 1852.

[31] Ibid., October 16, 1852.

[32] Ibid., August 2, 1852.

[33] Ibid., October 25, 1851.

[34] Ibid., August 14, 1852.

had earnestly opposed legislation which would make possible the extension of slavery into the territories. The nominee for the vice-presidency was George W. Julian of Indiana, son-in-law of J. R. Giddings.[35] Giddings himself had attended the convention as a delegate-at-large from Ohio.[36]

Hale toured through the Western Reserve. He and Senator Salmon P. Chase of Ohio spoke at Painesville on September 18, at a dinner given in honor of Giddings.[37] On September 30 Hale, Chase, and Giddings spoke at Orwell in Ashtabula County, having spoken at Warren in Trumbull County earlier in the same day.[38] The Free Soilers carried Ashtabula County with the following vote for the presidential candidates: Hale [Free Soil] 2475 votes, Scott [Whig] 2157 votes, Pierce [Democrat] 1079 votes.[39] Although Hale received a plurality in Ashtabula County he proved to be a very weak candidate throughout the nation. He received no votes in the electoral college and only half as many popular votes as Van Buren had received in 1848.[40] He failed so completely in the race because he and his party advocated the destruction of the Compromise of 1850 while the public were quite anxious to drop all discussion of the evils of slavery and keep the compromise in effect. The Democratic nominee,

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[35] Bassett, Short History, 485.

[36] Sentinel, August 14, 1852.

[37] Ibid., September 25, 1852.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., November 13, 1852.

[40] Bassett, Short History, 485-86, and Smith, Parties and Slavery, 37.

Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire, was pledged by his party to respect the finality of the compromise and he was overwhelmingly elected.[41]

A surprising development resulting from the campaign of 1852 was that Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, placed a large part of the blame for the defeat of the Whigs upon Giddings. Greeley claimed that Giddings had labored to defeat General Winfield Scott, the Whig presidential candidate, in order that Pierce might be elected and then with the federal administration in Democratic hands the slavery issue might more possibly be revived in Congress with Giddings playing an important role.[42] A study of the election returns in Giddings' home county does not substantiate Greeley's charge. There was no noticeable change in the ratio between the voting strength of the Free Soilers, Whigs, and Democrats of the county in this campaign from the ratio in other county elections after 1848. Had Giddings exerted the influence in the campaign of 1852 which Greeley charged against him surely the effect would have been apparent in the voting of Ashtabula County. It is not evident that Giddings was concerned by the representations of the editor of the Tribune.

In 1853 the Free Soilers returned L. S. Sherman to the Ohio Senate and elected J. J. Elwell to the Ohio House of Representatives by a plurality which lacked but few votes of being a majority despite the fact that both the Whigs and the Democrats had tickets in the field.[43] No room for doubt existed as to the dominance of the Free Soil Party in

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[41] Bassett, Short History, 485.

[42] Sentinel, November 13, 1852.

[43] Ibid., October 20, 1853.

county politics during the early 1850's.

Confident of the abiding hatred of slavery by his constituency Giddings continued to assail that institution from his post in the House. When the "Amistad" claims bobbed up again as a result of President Pierce's recommendation that they be paid he fought their payment.[44] The "Amistad" was a vessel aboard which some slaves had mutinied and had gained their freedom. Two Spaniards who operated plantations in Cuba had placed a cargo of slaves on the "Amistad" at Havana with the intention of taking them to a seaport on the southern coast of Cuba. After gaining control of the ship they commanded their owners to sail the ship to Africa but the Spaniards sailed north to the coast of Connecticut. The Spaniards were denied ownership of the slaves by the courts of the United States. Giddings stoutly opposed the payment of the value of these slaves to their former owners and the claims were not paid.

It is quite possible that the slavery issue would have been closed for many years if not permanently and the anti-slavery movement have weakened into a state of insignificance had not the Kansas and Nebraska bills been considered and passed by Congress. In January 1854 the committee on territories of the United States Senate reported out a bill to organize the territory of Nebraska. The bill was sponsored by the chairman of that committee, Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, a brilliant debater and a man very apt to gain his point. This bill, if enacted, would repeal the Missouri Compromise of 1820 which excluded

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[44] Cong. Globe, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 52-55; Julian, Life of Giddings, 309-10; Sentinel, January 19, 1854.

slavery from all parts of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 which lay north of 36° 30' North Latitude except in the state of Missouri. The entire North was aroused to oppose this bill and the anti-slavery agitation was revived in an aggravated form.[45] The issue of the Ashtabula Sentinel of February 2, 1854, contained a letter "To the People of Ohio" signed by four members of the United States Senate and four members of the United States House of Representatives. This letter advised the people of Ohio to oppose the repeal of the Missouri Compromise by holding public meetings of protest, by sending memorials to Congress; it requested clergymen to condemn the proposed Nebraska act from their pulpits. Of the four senators who signed this letter two were those of Ohio, Salmon P. Chase and Benjamin F. Wade; of the four representatives who signed, three were Ohioans, Lewis D. Campbell, Edward Wade, and Joshua R. Giddings.[46]

Public meetings were held in Ashtabula County and the advice contained in this letter was followed. Before the end of 1854 a beginning was made in the organization of a party in the North called the Republican Party which was to become the nation's most powerful political organization. This party throve so greatly in Ashtabula County that at the end of the year 1855 it was the county's most powerful force in politics. Through the successive stages of anti-slavery society, Liberty and Free Soil Parties, and finally the Republican Party passed the development of the anti-slavery movement of the county. Under the leadership of the Republican Party the anti-slavery movement reached

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[45] Bassett, Short History, 487-89, and Smith, Parties and Slavery, 94-109.

[46] Sentinel, February 2, 1854.

its goal and the slave was set free.

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